

Douglas Hesse

## The Place of Creative Writing in Composition Studies

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For different reasons, composition studies and creative writing have resisted one another. Despite a historically thin discourse about creative writing within *College Composition and Communication*, the relationship now merits attention. The two fields' common interest should link them in a richer, more coherent view of writing for each other, for students, and for policymakers. As digital tools and media expand the nature and circulation of texts, composition studies should pay more attention to craft and to composing texts not created in response to rhetorical situations or for scholars.

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In recent springs I've attended two professional conferences that view writing through lenses so different it's hard to perceive a common object at their focal points. The sessions at the Associated Writing Programs (AWP) consist overwhelmingly of talks on craft and technique and readings by authors, with occasional panels on teaching or on matters of administration, genre, and the status of creative writing in the academy or publishing. The sessions at the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) reverse this ratio, foregrounding teaching, curricular, and administrative concerns, featuring historical, interpretive, and empirical research, every spectral band from qualitative to quantitative. CCCC sponsors relatively few presentations on craft or technique, in the sense of telling session goers "how to write." Readings by authors as performers, in the AWP sense, are scant to absent.

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The distinctions between these meetings and their sponsoring organizations are tellingly metonymic of contrasts between academic creative writing and composition studies. CCCC features writing teachers who are also scholars of rhetoric, writing, and communication; AWP features writers who are often teachers and, very occasionally, scholars of writing. CCCC has maintained more or less a membership steady state with a fairly narrow target membership of people who hold teaching positions; AWP has been relatively entrepreneurial, seeking not only writers in the academy but writers beyond. Over the decades, the exhibits at CCCC have dwindled with every publisher consolidation to a couple dozen booths; in 2009 the exhibits at AWP occupied three large halls in the Chicago Hilton with hundreds of presses and journals. In 2010 the exhibit space at Denver's Colorado Convention Center was even vaster.

Professional creative writing's own critics have suggested over the years that academic creative writing has become what D. G. Myers called an elephant-making machine (146). Unable in large numbers to make a living by writing, "serious" authors depend on academic jobs, in programs that create magazines to publish serious work and that must attract students—master's, MFA, and, increasingly, PhD students—who cannot make a living by writing alone, who pursue academic jobs, and so on. Still, especially at the undergraduate level,

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enrollments in elective creative writing continue to expand to almost any level of available seats. Content with growing on its own terms, creative writing in all but rare cases performs no service role, aspires to no "across the curriculum" infiltration of chemistry or sociology, and

worries little about assessment. It does fret its status in the academy, usually in contrast with literature, though these days creative writing is riding pretty high, valued for its ability to attract students and majors and the kinds of faculty that colleges like to exhibit.

Creative writing sometimes condemns teaching composition as a regrettably necessary rite of passage toward a degree or ballast to more meaningful teaching, as many graduate students have made clear to me—at least, until they find religion on the job market. It is largely disinterested in (and occasionally contemptuous of) systematic research on writing and writers, especially empirical studies, trusting instead authors' own accounts, in memoir, essay, or interview, as far more valuable than anything in the guise of "scholarly article." I certainly value these latter ways of knowing about writing, grounded in the

interpretive humanities and the tradition of artists speaking about artistry, as healthy complements to more social scientific traditions. So do others (think of how Wendy Bishop valued writer's self-reports and the field values reflection), though most composition scholars are wary of author talk cast too far into unique and unassailable genius.

The research differences, of course, simply mark one way composition studies has often equally disdained creative writing. Part of this, let's be honest, is envy (well placed or not) of teaching eager students in courses whose outcomes are never denigrated by colleagues across the academy (no one asks, "why can't students coming from your course develop even a single character?"), envy for writing imagined as fun, the kind of thing that attracts people to English in the first place, the academy's pleasant porch or rec room. Kimberly Andrews suggests, "The corporate university values creative writing precisely as it produces figures of freedom for the business-oriented, skilled laborers of the captive new class that it trains. We are thus figureheads, beings of leisure, of no real *use* at all" (251). Some of us dismiss creative writing for pedagogies seen as habitual, narrow, and uninterrogated (and some creative writing teachers share that critique), or for absent research, or for perspectives and preoccupations that seem naive in (1) a world of writers with practical needs or (2) a world whose discursive practices sorely need critique.

At this sixty-year juncture of CCC, I'd like to consider the relationship between creative writing and composition studies. To a large extent, my interest is personal, even selfish, as I try to chart a way through the last third of a professional life spent firmly in composition studies, directing writing programs, and once having the great honor of chairing CCCC. Yet through it all, I've had a complicated relationship with the term *composition*. Although *composition studies*

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has emerged in the past thirty years as a capacious discipline with an increasingly vertical curriculum, and although many have aptly critiqued the narrow equation of *composition* with *first year comp*, to my mind the term has borne an undertow of service to schooling. In contrast, *writing* has seemed a larger extra-academic gaze: one could be a writer professionally, or more often avocationally, but one would not be a *composer* except in the quite different sense of setting notes on staves. Of course, just as *composition* can suffer narrowness, so can *writing* wax parodic in self-help books and workshops and colonies promoting the trappings of authoring, drinking the right kind of tea and buying the right kind of pens, having the right angst, the right contempt

for bourgeois culture, or, alternatively, the gumption to market words. Those excesses aside, my investment in writing came largely through an education at the University of Iowa, where, as an undergraduate, I took what struck me as a seamless array of courses in “creative” and “expository” writing in which both fiction and nonfiction genres served to make points or furnish practice. Even in my master’s courses, at that peculiar place and time, the focus was on what writers did—or might do—and how teachers might encourage them. It wasn’t until my first teaching position, in 1980 at what was then Findlay College, that I encountered thesis and support.

Of course, composition studies is now large and complex. The field bobs and weaves between analysis (knowledge about) and performance (knowledge how), rhetoric and writing, concept and craft, critique and complicity, ends academic and ends civic, composing as an instrumental activity and composing as a socially ludic one, even as the stuff with which we might make texts has long since transcended alphanumeric print. More on that later. So why

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ponder what “creative” writing might offer composition studies, which seems to be doing pretty well, thank you, rich in research, rich in curriculum, important in multiple spheres, modestly growing its institutional prestige? There are two reasons.

The first concerns disciplinary or, more crassly, academic turf. By that I’m less interested in who gets what resources or gets to teach which classes than I am in the consequences of those allocations. When creative writing and composition studies have little to do with one another, the division truncates not only what we teach and research but how writing gets understood (or misunderstood) by our students, our colleagues, and the spheres beyond. I develop these ideas in part 2 of this essay.

A second reason, explored in part 3, focuses on the identity of composition studies per se, particularly what we take as the purpose and practices of courses from first year comp through graduate studies. To state my concern (too) starkly: we’re at a crucial professional juncture, needing to find a good mix between being “about” writing/composing (that is, as focusing on interpretation, on analyzing texts or literate practices) and being “for” writing/composing (that is, focusing on production, on making texts). Obviously, this polarity can be thoroughly deconstructed (“analysis is productive,” etc.). However, if we go far toward being “about” composing, we privilege students as scholarly interpreters and researchers in ways paralleling the ways literary studies initiates

its students. While students having knowledge about composing is eminently worthy, ignoring different kinds of writing for wider audiences and purposes is marginalizing, especially when digital tools and networks expand the production and circulation of texts. Here's where some assumptions and practices for creative writing can prove useful.

### **Part 1: Where We've Been**

In its sixty-year history, *CCC* has published about 284 articles, reviews, and reports with “creative writing” appearing in the body of the text, with another 66 or so mentioning “imaginative writing.” (Even a term like *creative nonfiction* appears as a keyword in only 8 articles.) Nearly all of these have been passing references, often in conjunction with the ever-venerable debate about literature's place in the composition course or broader considerations of the nature of the English major or department. Substantial articles with creative writing as a major focus are considerably fewer. A generous count shows around 20. In 1999, Wendy Bishop noted that “professional journalists, poets, and novelists have spoken in *CCC* in their dual roles” but that “comparatively few creative writers have spoken in these pages in the 50 years of the journal's existence” (10). That same issue ran an Interchange: “Inquiring into the Nexus of Composition Studies and Creative Writing” among Mary Ann Cain, Ted Lardner, George Kalamaras, and Tim Mayers. Most recently *CCC* offered Rosalie Morales Kearns's article on “theorizing creative writing pedagogy,” which echoes aspects that many *CCC* writers, from Bishop to Bizzaro, have promoted in the past dozen years.

Several things explain *CCC*'s dearth of articles on creative writing (including the most mundane reason that perhaps few authors submitted them in the first place). Most obvious is that *CCCC* was formed to focus on some kinds of writing and related matters and not others. (The journal hasn't published many articles on recombinant DNA, either.) Even at that, the organization's focus took a while to sharpen. Among the “Workshop Reports,” essentially minutes from *CCCC* discussion groups that were a prime feature of the journal's early years, seven dealt with “imaginative writing” (1954–1973) or “creative writing” (1955–1970) in the freshman or composition course. Creative writing still remains a conference submission category. (At the 2010 convention, I spoke on a panel within that thread.) So creative writing was there for the claiming had the organization wanted it, or at least it was until 1967, when *AWP* began with fifteen writers

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at a dozen schools. But CCCC abjured. It's not as if the organization lacked things to do, certainly, but clearly our originating identity was vested largely in teaching and managing first-year requirements.

There is also the relative absence of theoretical/pedagogical writing about creative writing, especially by writers themselves—in *any* venue, let alone in composition journals, let alone in *CCC*. That has changed in recent years, but writers historically have viewed it somewhere between foolish and tawdry to say anything useful and broad about the status or pedagogy of creative writing. That dismissal stems from beliefs that real writers should be doing real writing rather than “merely” writing about writing (Bizzaro, “Should” 286). Further, what could actually be taught is imagined to be relatively small, as encapsulated in Ron MacFarland's often-cited observation that “I once ascertained five essentials of a serious writer: desire, drive, talent, vision, and craft. . . . [O]f the essentials, only craft can be taught” (34). Of course, craft is not nothing, but at some level it raises the specter of the tawdry, the world of popular writing for profit and its promise, for a fee, to provide “the secret of publishing [fill in the blank],” what Michelle Cross terms “commercial pedagogy” whose memory many “serious” academic writers have sought to bury (69). Indeed, a 1960 *CCC* article by Morris Freedman deplored it as “in its own generally shabby way big business” (22). The traditional appropriate font of creative writing pedagogy is lore, in the Northian sense, as Kelly Ritter and Stephanie Vanderslice aptly note, foremost the lore of the workshop, though interviews with writers or craft criticism (distinct from contemporary literary criticism) are fine, as to some extent are exercises—as long as they're confined to intro courses. Most scholarship about creative writing has advocated pedagogical possibilities beyond the workshop.

Twenty years ago, in a *CCC* review of Joseph Moxley's *Creative Writing in America*, D. W. Fenza, then and now AWP executive director, concluded with some pointed rhetorical questions:

Will continued theorizing on pedagogy only lead to the lamentable time when creative writing will be taught not by accomplished poets, novelists, and dramatists, but by professors with graduate specialties in the theory of creative writing? Do composition and literature faculty merely covet a place in the remarkable growth industry of writing programs--a place they hope to secure by patenting theories which only they may grasp and teach?

. . . The task of the composition teacher is often to bring competence to the unwilling; the task of the workshop teacher is often to cultivate genius in the unlikely. Both tasks are perhaps so difficult that any methodology is necessarily provisional. (240)

Given the rise of theory (and history and research) in composition studies in the time before and since, *CCC* would be a less-than-hospitable publishing venue for anyone sharing his perspective. Teacher/writers with feet in both composition and creative writing, including not only Bishop and Moxley but David Starkey, Hans Ostrom, and others, were often seen at the fringe of both fields—perhaps tolerantly or even compellingly so—not at their centers. One can only imagine Fenza’s fears now at calls for creative writing programs with multiple courses in history, research, pedagogy, and theory, such as Patrick Bizzaro’s proposal in his important 2004 *College English* article on the pre-disciplinary status of creative writing (“Research”), or calls for “creative writing studies,” such as Tim Mayers’s *((Re)Writing)* or Graeme Harper’s (Harper and Kroll).

However, the threat of imperialist composition hasn’t materialized. With important exceptions, our field has turned away from the imaginative and toward argument, civic discourse, academic genres, and rhetorical moves. Creative nonfiction is the clearest canary in the historical coal mine. Elsewhere I have observed how “creative nonfiction,” as an object of study and production in the academy, originally “belonged” to composition studies, albeit by default (“Who”). Personal essays, memoirs, new journalism, profile, travel writing—all of those genres grounded in “fact” and “reality”—were part of the belletristic tradition that “fictive” creative writing pretty much ceded to composition studies, where those genres mainstayed “advanced composition” or “advanced writing.” By the late 1980s, when Chris Anderson’s *Style as Argument* focused on the nonfiction of Joan Didion, Tom Wolfe, Norman Mailer, and Truman Capote, when Ross Winterowd’s *The Rhetoric of the “Other”*

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*Literature* sought to join the essayistic and rhetorical traditions, and when CCCC conventions featured readings by Gretel Ehrlich, Richard Selzer, and the like, it looked like creative nonfiction would gain a firm home within CCCC and composition studies. But exciting developments in rhetoric and theory, embodied, for example, in James Berlin’s critique of the poetic, channeled more of the field’s attention. At precisely the same time, for other complex reasons (including the fact that nonfiction was marketable in all sorts of ways that poems and stories increasingly were not) creative writing “discovered” creative nonfiction and, finding no staked claims, was more than happy to annex its genres. CCCC still has a creative nonfiction special interest group; the 2009 meeting attracted thirteen people.



The polite decline since then of creative nonfiction within composition studies leads to my third point: faced with deciding—as if there were some moment in which a choice was offered or demanded—among “rhetoric” (as argument and analysis), “composition” (as academic discourse), and “writing” (the broader making of texts), composition studies chose the first two, as least as measured in the field’s conference programs, journals, textbooks, and syllabi. The belletristic “personal” essay dwindled as an object of study or production except in the old guise of the narrative “mode” or the new school genre of literacy narrative. As “rhetorical situation” acquired more pedagogical power, later morphing into theories of discourse communities and genre, forms of writing that had no apparent rhetorical situation—except to acquire a readership—had little valence, especially when tainted by association with “the literary,” as an emerging discipline bristled against its historical second-class status within English departments.

The few times that the topic of creative writing has appeared in *CCC* can generally be sorted into two categories.

An early albeit minor theme is that creative writing develops basic personal, human qualities. A 1951 workshop report concluded, “We think that imaginative writing in the freshman course can be of value, not to prepare freshmen to become professional writers, but to awaken them to their possibilities of distinctive and valuable personal experience and expression” (“Imaginative Writing in the Freshman Course” 33). A 1957 report echoed that sentiment: “In an age when we experience so much in fragments and tend to the single-tracked approach to problems, students need to practice putting parts together in a whole.” The purpose of teaching creative writing is not to produce professional writers, “but to satisfy a human need to speak in a variety of ways” (“Creative Writing in the Composition/Communication Course” 137). While some early discussions cautioned that “‘therapeutical’ writing should not be encouraged” (“Imaginative Writing in Advanced Composition” 154), others embraced it. Of the six motives that Stephen Minot listed for creative writing, three are “partially conscious therapy,” “entirely conscious therapy,” and “ego formation,” (392–93). Randall Freisinger, approving Minot and contesting freshman composition as a service course, found writing “an indispensable tool for shaping personal and professional identities” (285), calling for “creative composition” if not creative writing per se. In a similar vein, following a careful analysis of creativity theories, Richard Lloyd-Jones asserted (thirty years before *No Child Left Behind*):



Schools can kill creativity. Good minds may wilt under the pressure of conventionality, just as they may grow rank without cultivation. . . . For the teacher there is more safety in discouraging the novel, partly because what seems creative may just be odd, partly because creative children are challenging people, and partly because the creative impulse, when dead and buried, carries no tales. (“Theoretical” 266)

This line of thinking plays into what by the 1990s was scorned as expressivism. Representing composition studies to a broad academic audience, Gary Olson hoped that the field would accomplish “much more than teaching students to ‘express themselves’” by helping them to “learn to engage in ideological critique . . . to effect real changes in their lives” (qtd. in McLemee). Olson, Berlin, and others located “real” change in material conditions, with anything short of that being conservative and complicit in the status quo. Wendy Bishop, herself a frequent target of Olson and the cultural constructivist apologists, rightly observed that expressivism had been straw-manned—“man” because so frequently synechdoched as Peter Elbow or Donald Murray—to contrast more “progressive” perspectives against their “untheorized” competitors (10). If expressivism is bad for its romantic naïveté, creative writing, narrowly cast as the celebration of romanticism, is surely all the more suspect.

The second tradition is subtler, though ultimately no less contentious. In it, writing is an art whose techniques are broadly transferrable from one situation to another; writing courses should exercise that art in terms in addition to building the “functionalist” prose of academic or vocational discourse. This view dominated the February 1964 issue of *CCC*, themed as “Composition as Art,” with articles on short stories, film, literature, and poetry. In his lead piece, “Poetry and Freshman Composition,” Marvin Bell concludes that “the effectiveness of certain techniques and the importance of particular concerns in composition are reinforced” when a student finds them “similar to elements in so-called ‘creative’ writing. The student winds up feeling . . . a concern for good writing, and the work necessary to accomplish it” (5). Ten years later, Francis Fennell called for writing instruction to parallel music lessons, with the goal to increase the student’s “ease and fluency but also to sharpen his technique, to change (read ‘revise’) his playing until it is more graceful, sensitive, nuanced” (177).

Developing general sensitivities to language hearkens back to Hugh Blair’s *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, its emphasis on making prose whose rhythms and structures were not only apt but pleasing. Recent tradition claims that style mainly disappeared from composition studies in the 1980s, although its revival has recently been celebrated and invoked (Johnson

and Pace). Charged with updating his chapter on style in Gary Tate's second edition of *Teaching Composition*, Ed Corbett mostly demurred, saying "there was little evidence that composition teachers were devoting much attention to style" (119).

Why? Substantially, the perception that developing "a style" was wrong-headed and incommensurate with ascending theories of textuality. These new theories fractured the few traditional divisions of register (informal versus formal, or high, middle, and low, or Walker Gibson's tough, sweet, and stuffy) into shifting features of proliferating discourse communities. Style became one aspect of convention, that complex of text aspects ranging from epistemology and authority to arrangement and citation form, aspects manifesting discursive formations and power structures as their makers interpolated them. Rather than some finite, transferrable features of Universal Writing, we encountered genres—lots, not just a few—until the very idea of general writing classes about no content in particular, as David Russell put it, became suspect (51). Even general instruction in writing processes offers no succor when complex activity systems govern not only what counted as an acceptable text but also the means of its production; not only were there myriad genres but also myriad processes. At best, writing teachers might have students analyze, emulate, and (possibly) critique target discourses; writing *about* them thus acquires as much importance as writing *in* them. (A modest example: as "visual rhetoric" has become more important, scholarship and textbooks focus considerably more on the rhetorical analysis of artifacts than their production.) Perhaps the major feature of the new postprocess world has been the primacy of "content,"

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the notion that writers needed to be steeped in a subject matter, whether in a themed comp course (as in the programs at Stanford and Duke) or, better, a course within a discipline. The apotheosis of this disposition is

the first-year course as writing about writing studies and its research practices, proposed by Doug Downs and Elizabeth Wardle.

My point is that a theoretical perspective that privileges writing-with-content or writing-as-rhetorical-analysis has little intellectual room for writing imagined not as a conversational turn on a particular subject matter but as a move in a Burkean parlor constituted differently. Put in familiar if reductive terms, the former is a Bartholomaen parlor where rhetors are heard by devel-

oping given topics along approved trajectories; the latter is an Elbovian parlor where writers gain the floor by creating interest, through the arts of discourse. The Elbovian parlor operates by what Richard Lanham calls “creating attention structures” from the stuff of words (21). This is one focus of creative writing.

Now, there’s a wide gap between these scholarly views of writing, which inflect much writing in many programs, and other teaching practices in a large number of classes. The belief in generally transferrable writing skills and processes has been alive and well in “contentless” classrooms across the country, not merely as the modes of discourse or even writing as process, but also through skills of summary and synthesis, audience analysis, structuring strategies, the management of logos, ethos, and pathos, and so on. This general skills approach to writing is simply more common in textbooks and classrooms than in *CCC* and other journals.

## **Part 2: The Cost of Closed Borders**

In 2009, the president of AWP was Ron Tanner. Ron and I were graduate students in different programs many years ago at the University of Iowa, where we were colleagues in the Writing Lab. We swap Christmas cards. I’m amused that Ron and I ended up presidents of two organizations whose names differ by the transposition of letters, he of AWP and I of WPA, the Council of Writing Program Administrators, formed a quarter century after CCC to address administrative issues in composition. AWP and WPA shared formative roots in programmatic concerns and the desire to gather those relatively few folks locally “in charge” of their respective writing domains. WPA and its several hundred members has continued that focus; AWP and its several thousand has grown quite otherwise.

Among other things, Ron has chaired the Department of Writing at Loyola College of Maryland, where he currently teaches. Students majoring in the department take at least thirteen courses in writing, including a four-course core and nine electives distributable among nonfiction, fiction, poetry, professional writing, or rhetoric. The department also houses Loyola’s first-year writing requirement, so someone like Ron stands at the AWP/WPA intersection.

Loyola’s program is constituted, like several of the twenty or so other freestanding, major-granting departments of writing, to house creative writing, technical or professional writing, and composition studies all under one catalog roof.<sup>1</sup> While I can imagine professorial life in that department and similar ones at Grand Valley State, Ithaca College, MIT, and Central Arkansas is no less contentious than in any department populated by different interests and

expertise, I'm struck by the principle that brings these fields together. Partly this is administrative convenience that finds as much in common among these writing enterprises as do departments of foreign languages among French, Italian, Japanese, and Arabic, saving resources (and acquiring clout) by having one department chair and affiliated bureaucracy rather than multiple ones.

More at their core, and distinguishing them from their historic fellow traveler literature or English, is the focus on production, of making texts like the ones they might also interpret or analyze, as opposed to making texts about studied artifacts. The difference is that between the varied studio arts of sculpture and painting and that of art history. Richard Lloyd-Jones used the term *poesis* to characterize the unifying emphasis on production. He found it furnished a common ground between engineering students and the Iowa Writer's Workshop poets, notables like Phillip Levine, he hired to teach them in a technical writing program he directed fifty years ago. Both had a general respect for making things, whether of steel or syllables. Lloyd-Jones notes that

the rules that were established to protect the high prestige of the creative writing program (as well as studio art and performance music) also made it possible to develop a program for a broader range of writers. Journalists came to our courses as well as poets, graduates as well as freshmen, biologists as well as literary critics. They all came to perfect their crafts; we claimed that the craft we offered allowed them better to define themselves as crafters, to govern their own materials, and to relate to the rest of the human world. ("Poesis" 46)

I'm uncertain that we can make such claims with a straight face anymore. We have too much and smartly fractured the quaint concept of craft. For many in composition studies, the ends of *poesis* pale against the serious cultural and political work that needs doing. How to shape persona through syntactic choices, how to adjust ratios of scene to summary and with what effect, how to manage rhythm and cadence for clarity and interest—all these may strike

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compositionists as precious compared to logical reasoning and forceful, politically astute analysis. The world may seem too far gone, its problems too pressing, to depend on the oblique arts of fiction to

change hearts and minds. So, too, might the economic and political interests of students demand something more than craft-iness.

From a disciplinary perspective, then, it might seem best to have composition and creative writing continue to fork their separate paths. The former

could maintain its serious practical focus on argument and idea, explanation and analysis, with the overt goals of shaping how people think and act. The latter could celebrate the aesthetic artifact, produced and read for pleasure—sometimes trifling, often serious—the artifact important for how it's made and experienced, important as much or more for what it is as what it does, written because its act of writing satisfies a creative, expressive desire that finds time spent writing preferable to time spent otherwise. That both composition and creative writing do their work mainly through words matters at the level of syntax and grammar, but not much further.

However, I suggest that creative writing and composition studies would do better by keeping more open borders, if not sharing a departmental house then at least being friendly neighbors with fenceless backyards. Partly this has to do with intellectual openness, getting around stereotypical aversions and understanding, even coming to value, aspects of how each views writing, including in such common denominators as the use of research, albeit to quite different purposes, in each tradition. For creative writing, this might mean tempering outdated aspersions of composition as formulaic tyranny, considering a broader repertory of teaching strategies, and developing curiosity about additional ways of studying writers and writing. For composition, this might mean recuperating new interest in writerly activities and processes, including the levels of style and word choice, adapting an expanded persona of themselves as writers for readerships beyond other scholars, and making curricular or, at least, conceptual room for writing that does not “respond” to a rhetorical situation. (That's part 3.)

Not only would this be good for us, but it would also be good for students to have a more connected and comprehensive view of writing in all its guises. As it is, I think students experience the relationship between composition studies and creative writing in three ways: silence, in which the connections among different genres and purposes of writing go unremarked; truism, in which teachers trying to be hopeful offer a few general precepts about kinds of writing, in ways that strike even students as shallowly reductive; or stridency, in which interested proponents decry the (choose one) strictures/preciousness/limits/vapidity of their counterparts. The result for students is alternatively mysticism, compartmentalism, and cynicism, as they live in ever more complex text worlds in which boundaries so clear to teachers are not to them. This helps neither writers' nor students' perceptions of writing—nor those of future workers, taxpayers, consumers, and citizens.

Which brings me to another layer of why composition studies and creative writing might open their borders: a political one. From the summer of 2009 through the spring of 2010, I've been alternatively involved with NCTE and MLA in trying to shape a professional response to the Common Core Standards for reading and writing. In early 2009, the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers jointly decided to develop national standards for college and work readiness. They contracted two testing organizations, the College Board and ACT, along with the group Project Achieve, to author these standards, and while they had a "expert feedback group," there were no college writing experts—creative or compositional—involved. Late in the process, they invited professional groups twice to respond, once through writing (see Bomer et al.) and once in person, as I joined a seventeen-member panel in Washington, D.C., in early October. On both occasions we protested the extraordinarily narrow view of writing encapsulated in the standards. Writing was represented as reporting information and reading/researching as extracting information; the Web, for example, was treated entirely as a "source," not as a medium of creation and exchange. (The group operates with about a Web minus-5.0 sensibility.) There was no place for writing as a civic activity, let alone an aesthetic or social one. In response to our concerns, the authors did some revising but then proceed to "back map" (their term) the standards for every grade level down to first. The Common Core Standards have been adopted by almost every state; indeed, they're virtually mandated for anyone hoping to

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receive Race to the Top funds. The Obama administration likes them (Office of the White House Press Secretary).

I interject this long narrative to underscore how creative writing and composition studies are both simultaneously understood by outsiders well beyond our respective realms, including

policymakers on campuses or in federal agencies who make decisions that affect not only the teaching but also the perception of writing. It's completely plausible for them to cast creative writing as a decorative opportunity, with no practical import, serving a few genius students, and composition studies as a training regimen for school and vocational skills. Both fields are better served by a richer view of writing that articulates the values of a creative, productive

art, “practical” in much wider terms than would be imagined. I’m not saying we instill this view through strength-in-numbers lobbying. Rather, I think it comes more gradually and incrementally, through the ways we render writing to each other, to our students, and to our colleagues, as a life activity with many interconnected manifestations.

### **Part 3: Composition’s Stake in the Creative**

Recently a colleague told me she begins a course by having students write editorials because students know the genre and it has the virtue of brevity. Really? While current twenty-year-olds undoubtedly read plenty of short timely arguments, they certainly don’t frame “editorial” as columns arrayed along a left edge, inside the back page of a newspaper section, two or three every day, the space occasioning the regular appearance of a text, the newspaper’s knowable and predictable circulation forming the potential readership. For current students, print is less the medium from which digital texts spring and against which they’re read, than some different non-interactive mode that’s oddly separated from the means of production. Once upon a time, composition teachers could treat students as ultimately making practice texts to build skills for future writing, mainly in other courses and in jobs, because only the scantest few would ever actually “publish” beyond those sites, beyond the venerable “letter to the editor.” First desktop publishing, then Web 1.0, and now social networking have changed all that. Six years ago Kathleen Yancey noted that if the nineteenth century was the building of a reading culture, then the twenty-first was the building of a writing culture. A recent article in *Seed* magazine predicted (rather hyperbolically, using questionable geometric predictions) “nearly universal authorship” with nearly everyone publishing by 2013, defining something as *published* if read by a hundred other people (Pelli and Bigelow). Given the audience of many poetry chapbooks, the threshold is as reasonable as any.

The world of blogs, wikis, podcasts, videos, and even old-fashioned Web pages ensures that writing will be made public—just not that it will be read. Updating familiar terms from two decades past, we’ve gone from audience addressed, through audience invoked, to audience imagined and seduced. Unlike the old composition, the new composition includes textmaking for situations in which readerships are neither compelled nor circumscribed. One of its main challenges is how writers make readers pay attention. That challenge doesn’t pertain to the academic situation, in which teachers assign and thus compel students to read. One hopes. Nor does it pertain to workplace situations in



which reports, policies, contracts, various communications, and so on are produced to meet specific needs. That other kinds of writing can and will be ignored is nothing new. No one was made to read, let alone purchase, Addison and Steele's *The Tatler* or its companion eighteenth-century periodicals, and publishing in the civic sphere outside the legislatures and courts has long required the attention and approval of editors and potential readers. Still, until the past quarter century, the world of elective reading and writing was fairly circumscribed: a finite number of presses, publishers, and venues existed, and while obviously one could write privately or for friends, the "real" chances of publishing were remote. That hardly prevented composition instructors from assigning civic writing (and even holding the results roughly up to the standards of intellectual magazines), but the relatively narrow domains of the published discourse made the targets reasonably clear. A student might never actually publish a *New York Times* editorial or an *Atlantic* essay, but at least those venues consolingly represented writing in the public sphere. The etherworld expands all that, we famously know.

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into the world, to make a presence like a tiny stone in the vast fast riverbed of history, deflecting time and commerce however feebly. On the other hand are the economic forces that feed the flow even as they distribute the pebbles. When my screen implores me to "Help make Facebook better for Friend

X," what's revealed is the monetizing of identity gathered in this site. The larger my presence—constituted through status updates, notes, photos, talents for digital farming, prowess at killing pixel mob bosses—the more valuable I am to Facebook, Google, Comcast, and Cisco Systems. The paradox is that these tools provide the means to inscribe myself even as they create the need to do so.

Now, I surely appreciate the space and means afforded by Blogger, YouTube, WordPress, Flickr, and their myriad kin. To note their capitalist motivation is not to strip them of value. And while each has constraints, from file size to copyright paranoia, and while the fervent churn of mass culture produces in them a sameness of content, they offer more access (albeit more potential than kinetic) to wider publics than did their print and broadcast forebears.

What explains the drive to matter in the world, a drive grinding most garishly in extreme cases: Richard Heene's balloon boy hoax across Colorado skies and world televisions, Tareq and Michaela Salahi's crashing a White House state dinner? Perhaps human genetics, perhaps more likely social constructions—or rather, a counter construct, against anonymity and alienation. Exploring the absence of traditional economic motivations for sharing writing online, James Porter simply notes that “people write because they want to interact, to share, to learn, to play, to feel valued, and to help others” (219).

To share, to learn, to feel valued. Here is where creative writing now intersects composition. For most writers, writing fulfills personal and social interests, in ways parallel to woodworking, knitting, baking, or fishing, to scrapbooking, singing, photography. While many students (and accountants and administrative assistants) might imagine publishing the novel or screenplay to makes them rich and famous, many others aspire simply for readers, however few.

We could diagnose this passion in Marxist terms as false consciousness and find complicit anyone teaching writing as a ludic or aesthetic enterprise. However, even granting the primacy of material concerns in Maslow's hierarchies of need, and fully endorsing the pursuits of justice, sustainability, and care, I assert that composition should value dimensions of life in addition to work, school, and political action. There are dimensions of entertainment, engagement, or, more mundanely, simply how to pass time, and within these are realms of self-sponsored writing and reading. Now, it might be that these are not the concerns of composition, that developing individuals or human potential or the life of the pen and pixel as well as the mind are aspirations of a more naive field. It might be that composition studies has two prime purposes: (1) as agents of disciplinary and workplace interests, to discipline writers and readers in practical textual modes they wouldn't pursue on their own and (2) to inculcate broad rhetorical and critical facilities, advancing the civic and social good.

Let me temporarily (albeit grudgingly) accept these purposes and focus on the second. The digital age has exploded whatever tidiness might have characterized previous civic rhetorical situations. It's never been pervasively true that brilliant single rhetorical performances can much change opinion and belief, but it was closer to possible when readerships were relatively definable and communicative channels narrow. Still, we bravely taught *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos* (but mostly *logos*), in the perhaps necessary fiction that right reason and evidence could win out, especially if we simultaneously created a learned

readership fit to the task. That fiction today is harder to sustain and those readers harder to make. That's certainly so for students experiencing a quite different textual world in which knowledge and belief are shaped less by special isolated rhetorical acts than by countless encounters with any manner of texts, as if belief were a massive wiki, some of its revisions overtly rhetorical and others not apparently so.

The point is that rhetoric takes many forms in constituting belief and action. Composition's current interest in multimodality emphasizes the ancient "available means in a given case" to focus on ALL the available means, in whatever media or, I'll add, in any genre, including the nonfactual, nonpropositional, noncompelled by rhetorical situation. Beyond nineteenth- and early twentieth-century naturalism and beyond didactic children's literature (especially our contemporary penchant to camouflage moral lessons in the lives of vegetables, rodents, or bears), creative writing is rarely produced as meeting kairotic demands. The aesthetic has a rhetorical force even as the belletristic can carry

**The aesthetic has a rhetorical force even as the belletristic can carry information and idea. It is the rhetorical force of image and identification, metaphor and symbol, of narrative arc and character as actor and acted upon, of Burkean ratios enacted in possibility rather than constrained by given formations.**

information and idea. It is the rhetorical force of image and identification, metaphor and symbol, of narrative arc and character as actor and acted upon, of Burkean ratios enacted in possibility rather than constrained by given formations. It may not be the full frontal assault of argument, but to imagine it has no effect beyond killing time is to misunderstand what is actually

possible in an age surfeited by texts. Many compositionists have rightly bristled at Archibald McLeishian *ars poetic* demurrals of poetry's unanswerability to anything but platonic "being." But between Algernon Swinburne and Ayn Rand lie vast swaths of "creative writing" that shape what readers think and do—and satisfy their makers' desires, personal and social, to make texts with little explicit purpose beyond making them but with consequences beyond their simply having been made. Some of this "creative" writing is grounded in imaginative fiction. As much is grounded in experience, memory, image and sound, reality shaped into texts, to represent, yes, but also to ponder and render.

### **Conclusion?**

Consider an invitation I received from my colleague in the University of Denver Writing Program, Blake Sanz. We're piloting a multimodal element in several

sections of our first writing course, and Blake asked several of us to attend a screening of works produced by his students, who

worked to create one- to three-minute-long videos which express their opinions on a variety of things—TV shows, movies, political and social issues, musicians, and any number of other topics. A sampling of what we can look forward to includes: a spoof of the Taco Bell Diet ad, a video commentary on the My Lai Massacre, a video that demonstrates how *Avatar* is a derivative of *Pocahontas*, a video commentary on the evolution of Lady Gaga, and a parody movie trailer for *The Time Traveler's Wife* that imagines it as a horror film. Student filmmakers have, in preparation for this event, written brief artist's statements, which will be on display. Additionally, they will each introduce their short films before screening them, and will be available for questions regarding their process and purpose.

Is this creative writing or composition? The title of the course is “Rhetoric and Academic Writing,” and I assert that these projects address both terms, making points, explaining and defending choices and intentions. But calling students “filmmakers?” Who have produced videos? To “express opinions?” Accompanied by “artist's statements?” What's all that? I say, “Fitting language for rhetorically creative (or creatively rhetorical) texts like those currently circulating in popular culture and, so, apt elements of an introductory composition course.” By this observation, I don't necessarily valorize remix videos as the best teaching target, nor would I be thrilled with first-year composition colleagues who exclusively assigned projects like this one; in fact, I'd find them derelict. As I've mused in response to Cindy Selfe's eloquent call for multimodality, time in composition courses is finite, and writing remains vital, not only for our stakeholders but also for shaping thought and culture (“Response”). Still, in Blake's class, the videos were not the only texts produced; students wrote several other papers in arguments popular and academic, most of them source-based, in double-spaced Arial or Times New Roman. To have them make videos and subject them to the same reflective (and rhetorical) analyses as he did other texts in the class—both texts students encountered and ones they produced—enhances their understanding of the spectrum of writing and composing.

More important than the medium of video in this example is the invitation to creativity, which, after all, has been my topic. It remains to be seen whether “creative writing” will soon explore multimodality to the extent composition studies has, or whether many of its practitioners and apologists would see student videos as manifestations of “creative writing.” I hope it might because the new media offer a complex (if not altogether neutral) turf to which we might bring our different traditions, exploring more commonalities even as

we respect our dissimilar orientations and aspirations. Failing that, though, I suggest that composition studies unilaterally explore the place of creative writing—of creative *composing*—in teaching, in scholarship, and in our expanded sense of ourselves as text makers.

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## Note

1. A reasonably comprehensive list of “Writing Majors at a Glance” as of January 2009, compiled by the CCCC Committee on the Major in Rhetoric and Composition, shows majors at some seventy schools; I’m focusing here only on those constituted as autonomous departments.

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## Douglas Hesse

Douglas Hesse is professor and founding director of the Writing Program at the University of Denver. A past chair of CCCC and a past president of WPA, he is co-author with Becky Bradway of *Creating Nonfiction*.